
NEW TITLES

History

THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM: Judaism, Christianity, Islam
by F. E. Peters
Princeton, 1982
216 pp. \$14.50

Jews, Christians, Muslims—the “three peoples of the Book”—share a common heritage. All three embrace the original Covenant with God; the latter venerate the Hebrew scriptures, though they have acquired their own distinctiveness through new revelation. Similarities beyond monotheism (e.g., dietary restrictions) have led some scholars to consider early Christianity a Jewish reform movement and Muhammad a Hebrew fundamentalist. Neither rejecting nor endorsing such notions, Peters, a professor of Near Eastern studies at New York University, contrasts the three groups’ approaches to scripture, theology, law, community, and mysticism as they successively developed between the sixth century B.C. and the 11th century A.D. Attempting to make faith “rational,” all three borrowed from Greek thought. And all were enriched by esoteric sects (Cabalism, Gnosticism, Sufism) that emphasized private revelation. In a more worldly vein, Peters notes that taxation, “which fell under secular jurisdiction in the Christian Roman Empire and was imposed upon Jewish communities from without, was part of the preserve of religious law in Islam.” Not least among Peters’ accomplishments is his explanation of how three “sharers of a common sacred history,” under pressure of different circumstances (e.g., Christianity’s adaptation to the Roman Empire, Islam’s struggle with tribal rivalries), grew to be so distant from one another.

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR: Christian Chivalry and the Crusades: 1095–1314
by Stephen Howarth
Atheneum, 1982
321 pp. \$18.95

In 1314, a commission of cardinals found Jacques de Molay, last Master of the Order of the Temple of Solomon, guilty of sodomy, heresy, and idolatry and burned him at the stake. Ever since, the Knights Templar have been portrayed by historians as either saints or miscreants. Howarth, a historian and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, ar-



Stone-carved head of a Templar knight, Temple Church, London. Photograph by Stephen Howarth.

gues that they were mainly victims. The order was established around 1118 in Jerusalem. Its founders were Hugh de Payens, a middle-rank nobleman, and other French knights dedicated to defending the recently reconquered Holy Land. Their aspiration: "to unite the contrary virtues of monk and warrior." The knights, whose ranks soon swelled to include Germans, Italians, and Britons, quickly gained recognition, financial support, and special privileges (mainly tax exemptions) from the Church. Before long, they owned land throughout Europe and in Outremer, the Holy Land. For over 180 years, the knights valiantly defended Jerusalem against Muslim armies. But a death blow came from fellow Christians, the secular princes who envied their wealth and prestige. Caught up in the political struggle between the papacy and the King of France, the order was finally dissolved by Pope Clement V in 1312. Howarth's lively history underscores a paradox of medieval Christendom—its martial piety.

**ORDEAL BY FIRE:
The Civil War
and Reconstruction**
by James M. McPherson
Knopf, 1982
694 pp. \$29.95

The bloodiest of American wars and the last to be fought on native soil, the Civil War changed the way Americans viewed themselves. "Union" became "nation"; the "United States" a singular noun. And the federal government emerged as a more powerful instrument: It issued money (before the war, state-chartered banks had), conscripted men directly when states failed to meet quotas, and confiscated property. The 13th Amendment abolishing slavery "established a precedent by which the next six restricted state powers or expanded those of the national government." The appellation "first modern war" is perhaps a misnomer, since "every war is more modern than the previous one," argues McPherson, a professor of history at Princeton. But his descriptions of Northern industry—exemplified by railroads, rifle technology, and mass production—highlight the modernity of the war's machinery, if not of its tactics (which remained essentially